



Regina Downtown BID and Regina's Warehouse BID

INNOVATION

As BIDs our mandate is to support our districts and engage with property and business owners. Staff Supper evolved from hospitality business owners expressing concern for the mental state of their employees during the pandemic shutdown. The hospitality industry, by nature, is a very connected industry and as directors we wanted to create a way for the many now at home (but not working from home) to feel connected with their fellow workers. This project enabled us to engage with the community at a micro level, developing a community of support for those workers most affected by the shutdown. We found ourselves doing many things outside of our 'normal' daily tasks and we became 'jacks of all trades' – from helping to organize deliveries, packaging meals, delivering meals, and hosting the zoom chats.

The weekly zoom call provided a safe space to talk about how the pandemic was affecting everyone – their fears, concerns, and ultimately optimism. We provided our participating restaurants a revenue source and an opportunity to enter the 'take-out' environment early in the shutdown.

At the conclusion of the project, we decided to take a creative route and celebrate the project by putting together a cookbook that could be shared beyond the project participants and showcase the businesses that supported the project. The participating restaurants, along with the two BID directors shared our reflections on the pandemic and lockdown, along with several recipes, which were compiled into the Heart & Soul cookbook.

OUTCOME

The COVID 19 pandemic has decimated our food and beverage industry. Many restaurants, bars and nightclubs have had to close their doors to the public, some now only relying on takeout or delivery for income. Servers, bartenders, and many others were laid off abruptly once the provincial state of emergency was instituted. Unlike other industries affected, these employees could not 'work from home.' Their livelihood was abruptly halted not only financially but emotionally as well. This program:

- Provided an opportunity to virtually connect (via zoom) with fellow staff members and others who have been laid off in the food and beverage industry. There were over 70 participants during the seven-week program, with many participating for all seven weeks.
- Provided a low-cost dinner for food and beverage employees experiencing financial hardship. 300 subsidized dinners were sold at minimal cost over the seven weeks.
- Provided mental health/peer support and camaraderie to affected employees in the food and beverage industry.
- Supported nine restaurants who have chosen to focus on delivery and takeout and kept staff employed.
- Supported the Regina Foodbank, which is experiencing a massive increase in users due to the economic hardship of the pandemic.

While the program had a defined start and end date, it could be easily adapted. Bringing our community together in a virtual way over food and drink will always have a lasting impact and while this was in response to the pandemic, we do think it could occur at another time.

EXECUTION

On March 11, WHO declared a global pandemic due to COVID 19. A month later we launched Staff Supper, which ran until the state of emergency was lifted and business could reopen. We developed a project plan, assigned roles and responsibilities, identified participating restaurants, and executed the project.

We worked to secure weekly participating restaurants to provide a vegetarian and a non-vegetarian meal and we subsidized the cost of the meal so that participants were only charged a nominal fee. A local craft brewery provided beverages in kind.

Extensive outreach was conducted by both BIDs, all were welcome, and you could join the call even without purchasing a meal. A closed Facebook group for participants was also created.

The BIDs coordinated registration, promotion, payment, zoom calls and delivery. Even though we were all new to this way of connecting, it was seamless.

When the program ended, we decided to create a cookbook utilizing a project coordinator to reach out to restaurants for recipes, COVID reflections, and photographs and hired a graphic designer to oversee the photo shoots and design the final cookbook.

We also partnered with the Regina Foodbank to assist with publicity and promotion while encouraging donations to the Foodbank.

REPRESENTATION

The program was developed to respond to isolation and fear experienced by many in the food and beverage industry during the pandemic lockdown. The success of the program was tied to the passion and commitment of the two BID directors and their staff, to their members and their member's employees. This program was focused solely on food and beverage employees in order to stay within a minimal budget and keep it manageable during a time when physical interaction was discouraged. The participants were a diverse group – we had business owners and employees participating, all of whom represent the many cultures in our community. The Staff Supper initiative was limited to food and beverage workers in our respective BIDs. The cookbook, however, is intended for a much larger reach and will be made available to the general public.

REPLICATION

This program was developed through a collaboration of two different BIDs in Regina. It could very easily be replicated in other communities or at a different time. While this was focused on the lockdown, it could easily be adapted to bring any community together. It does not have to be rooted in a pandemic. Staff supper could be adapted to celebrate the end of a Restaurant Week event or other types of events. Depending on resources and budgets, future programs could increase or decrease the level of meal cost subsidy offered by the BID. The focus and goal of the project was to allow our community to feel connected. One thing the pandemic has taught us is our need to feel connected and through this initiative we learned that while we had to be apart, being together was more important than ever – something we believe will continue long after the pandemic.

The staff supper program could be executed without the cookbook and vice versa. The production value of the cookbook could be increased or decreased dependent on budget. It can also be created as a digital-only publication which would reduce costs.

COMPLEXITY/SIMPLICITY

This program was extremely simple to execute. Staff supper used a digital platform called wufoo to assist the BIDs with order intake. The BID directors worked personally with the restaurants to ensure all orders were filled. To further connect with the program participants, the BID directors carried out the delivery orders themselves. We used Zoom to connect with the participants and we used online social platforms like Jackbox to engage with participants. We connected with participants through Facebook and email. Once the initial call had been set up, we were then able to follow the template each week. The digital platforms available allowed us to register, schedule and connect relatively easily and with minimal cost. The cookbook was relatively easy to produce as we hired a third party experienced in publishing to coordinate and create.